

Personal Best

HOPE HealthLetter®

SEPTEMBER 2024

LOWER YOUR RISK: Metabolic Syndrome

Metabolic syndrome raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and other potentially serious health problems.

About one-third of U.S. adults have metabolic syndrome, which means they have at least three of these conditions:

Abdominal obesity: Waist measures more than 40 inches (men) or 35 inches (women).

Elevated blood pressure: Blood pressure is at least 135/85. The higher the level, the higher the risk for heart disease.

Higher than normal blood sugar: Fasting blood glucose level is 100 to 125 mg/dL (prediabetes).

Low (good) HDL cholesterol: HDL cholesterol is less than 40 mg/dL (in men) or 50 mg/dL (in women).

High triglycerides (a type of blood fat).



You can reduce your metabolic risk factors with these lifestyle changes:

Get serious about eating healthy. Eat mostly vegetables, fruits, protein-rich lean foods and whole grains.

Out of shape? Get moving regularly, even if it's just a daily walk. Resistance exercises boost metabolic health, too. If you're unaccustomed to exercise, get your health care provider's okay before beginning a physical activity routine.

Don't skimp on sleep. Adults need seven to nine hours a night.

Get help for chronic stress. Ongoing stress can interfere with the body's use of calories and nutrients. Talk to your health care provider about counseling or other stress-reducing therapy.

If you smoke, quit. Smoking harms your blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure numbers.

While scientists don't know what causes metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance* and abdominal obesity are thought to be major factors. The good news is, metabolic syndrome is treatable. While you can't change your age or genes, there are lifestyle changes that can help potentially prevent or reverse metabolic syndrome.

***Insulin resistance** occurs when cells become less sensitive and eventually resist insulin, the hormone the pancreas manufactures to make it easier for your body to use blood glucose (sugar).

The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, QuikRisk™ Assessment: When Your Head Hurts, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V9tools.

BEST bits



■ **September is Cholesterol Education Month.** Do you know your cholesterol score? Cholesterol isn't all unhealthy. In fact, your body needs it to build healthy cells. But too much LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol raises heart disease risk while a healthy level of HDL (high-density lipoprotein) may help protect your heart, according to the American Heart Association. If you don't know your cholesterol score, schedule a simple blood test to find out. Your health care provider can explain the findings and advise any dietary and medication changes.



■ **Women's Health and Fitness Day on September 25** is a day for women to focus on feeling their best. Overdue for a mammogram, Pap test, HPV test, or physical? Make those appointments. Need to up your fitness level? Explore ways to fit regular exercise into your life. The Office on Women's Health offers practical ways to increase your fitness with activities to fit your needs based on your age, stage of life, and physical abilities. Learn more at womenshealth.gov.

■ **Flu shot reminder: September and October are good times to get your flu shot.** Flu season is right around the corner and it takes about two weeks after vaccination to build immunity to the virus and lower your risk of experiencing the fever, cough and body aches of seasonal influenza. Although the vaccine doesn't always provide total protection from the virus, it's the best way to reduce the odds of serious complications from the flu. Also, ask your health care provider if you're up to date for COVID vaccination.



Ancient Grains, Modern Nutrition

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

You're probably familiar with the most popular grains in North America, which are wheat, corn and rice. But if you want something different to fill the whole grains portion of your plate, try an ancient grain, such as quinoa, teff or amaranth.

These grains are called *ancient* because their origins go back thousands of years. They come from ancient civilizations, such as the Incas, Aztecs and Egyptians. These grains have remained largely unchanged in the past few hundred years and are not modified by modern breeding techniques.

Ancient grains that you can try include:

- Wheat, such as spelt, einkorn, farro, emmer and kamut.
- Blue corn.
- Black barley.
- Red or black rice.
- Quinoa.
- Teff.
- Amaranth.
- Sorghum.
- Millet.
- Buckwheat.

Many of these grains are available in their whole, unrefined form. Plus, when these grains are ground into flours, the whole grain is used. The resulting flour has more fiber, vitamins and minerals than refined grains (e.g., white flour or white rice).

Pseudocereal grains, such as quinoa and amaranth, are seeds, but they are used as grains when cooking. They are always in their whole form (they cannot be refined) and are a nutritious option.

Ancient grains are often more sustainable than other grains. They typically require fewer inputs, such as water and pesticides. **Cool fact:** Quinoa is naturally coated in a bitter seed coat called saponin, which keeps pests away. It reduces the need for pesticides but can have a bitter taste. Always rinse quinoa before cooking.

Fortunately, finding ancient grains has become easier as their popularity has grown. They are in most grocery stores, health food stores and online retailers.

Mixed Vegetable and Quinoa Salad

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup quinoa, rinsed | 2 green onions, chopped |
| 2 cups water | 1 cup chopped fresh parsley |
| 1 can (15 oz.) red kidney beans, drained | 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil |
| ½ English cucumber, diced | 3 tbsp lemon juice |
| 1 yellow pepper, seeded and diced | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| 1 medium carrot, peeled and diced | ½ teaspoon salt |



Combine quinoa and water in a saucepan over medium heat. **Boil**, then reduce heat and simmer about 15 minutes, until quinoa absorbs all the water. **Remove** from heat, cover, rest 5 minutes, then fluff with fork. **Allow** to cool. **In** a serving bowl, combine beans, cucumber, pepper, carrot, onion and parsley. **Add** cooled quinoa and stir to combine. **In** a small bowl, whisk together oil, lemon juice, garlic and salt. **Pour** over quinoa and vegetables. Stir to combine and serve.

Makes 6 servings. Per serving: 203 calories | 8g protein | 9g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 6g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 26g carbohydrate | 5g sugar (0g added sugar) | 7g fiber | 443mg sodium



TIP of the MONTH



September is Whole Grains Month

Whole grains are a nourishing addition to the diet, since they contain fiber, protein and a host of vitamins and minerals. Since they still have their fibrous coat intact, they may take a while to cook. Plan ahead. Allow at least an hour when you're making brown rice, wild rice, sorghum or hulled barley. For quick-cooking whole grains, choose quinoa, buckwheat or millet, which cook in 15 to 20 minutes. Or choose whole-grain breads, which require no cooking.





QUIKRisk™ Assessment: Are you overthinking?

Do you frequently replay past events or worry about future ones? If so, you might be overthinking, which can cause unnecessary distress and take up time you could be spending on more enjoyable or productive activities. True problem-solving — analyzing situations and generating possible solutions — can be useful, but fretting endlessly is not.

Take this assessment to determine whether you're an overthinker. Check the box for the statement(s) that apply to you:

- Do you often dwell on past events or conversations?
- Do you often worry about the future?
- Do you struggle with decisions because you're afraid of making the wrong choice?
- Do you have difficulty sleeping because your mind is racing?
- Do you frequently seek reassurance from others about your actions?
- Do you often feel exhausted from overanalyzing situations?
- Do you tend to assume the worst about situations?
- Do you feel compelled to explore every negative thought that comes to mind?

If you answered yes to some of these questions, consider the following strategies:

Redirect your thoughts to the present moment.

Schedule specific worry times or move on to engaging activities after a few minutes of overthinking.

When you have a negative interpretation or expectation of events, ask yourself, "What's the evidence?" and brainstorm other possible explanations or outcomes.

Learn a relaxing practice, such as deep breathing or meditation, and practice it daily for at least five to ten minutes.

Reach out to friends or family who can provide helpful perspectives, or obtain a referral to a mental health professional.

Sleep procrastination, sometimes called revenge bedtime procrastination, is sacrificing sleep to spend more time on leisure activities, such as streaming, gaming or social media scrolling. People who do this are trying to make up for a lack of free time. They delay going to bed and falling asleep, which if done long-term causes sleep deprivation. Insufficient duration and quality of sleep can worsen your health, including poor thinking, memory and decision-making. Solutions: Get started by moving your bedtime back by 15 minutes, then 30 minutes and so on. Try to stop using electronic devices at least 30 minutes before going to bed. During that time, practice a relaxing routine that doesn't involve screen time. Banish all electronic devices from your bedroom. Keep a consistent bedtime, even on weekends.

Compassion Fatigue

By Eric Endlich, PhD

People who spend a great deal of time caring for others are at risk for a type of burnout known as compassion fatigue.

While caregivers of family members can develop this condition, it's especially common among health care professionals, such as nurses, psychotherapists and hospice workers.

People in these roles may be exposed indirectly to a great deal of the trauma experienced by those they care for, which can in turn have a powerful impact on them. Compassion fatigue can develop after one intensive exposure or a long series of events. Symptoms may include:

- Exhaustion.
- Anxiety, apathy and depression.
- Helplessness, hopelessness and resentment.
- Loss of motivation.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Relationship conflicts.
- Substance abuse or other potentially addictive behavior (e.g., gambling, stress eating).
- Headaches or stomachaches.



It's vital that caregivers and health care professionals recognize these signs early so that they can take steps to avoid developing full-blown compassion fatigue.

Helpful measures include:

- Setting limits and boundaries, including separating your personal and professional life.
- Reaching out to friends or colleagues for support.
- Practicing good self-care, such as exercising regularly, eating a well-balanced diet and getting enough sleep.
- Learning a calming practice, such as yoga, tai chi or meditation.
- Focusing on the aspects of life that are under one's control.
- Finding other meaningful, satisfying hobbies or activities.
- Obtaining a referral for therapy with a mental health professional from your primary care provider, health plan or employee assistance program.



September is Prostate Cancer Awareness

Month: a good time to learn about even more evidence why you should continue to increase your cardiorespiratory fitness. A recent Swedish study concluded that men who experienced an annual improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness of at least 3% were found to have a 35% reduced risk of developing prostate cancer compared to men whose fitness declined by 3%. To increase your cardiorespiratory fitness, experts recommend exercising aerobically — walking, hiking, swimming, dancing — for at least 150 minutes a week.

body & mind

Q: Does caffeine cause stress?

A: The relationship between caffeine and stress is somewhat complex. Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- ❖ Not everyone metabolizes (processes) caffeine the same, so the effects on individuals can vary.
- ❖ Caffeine can raise heart rate and blood pressure temporarily, so for some people, this may cause jittery feelings, especially in larger amounts.
- ❖ Suddenly stopping caffeine use after regular intake can lead to withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches and fatigue.
- ❖ An excess of caffeine, especially late in the day, can interfere with sleep for some people, which could become a source of stress.
- ❖ Modest doses of caffeine can boost one's mood, potentially reducing stress levels.



THE BOTTOM LINE: It can be a matter of trial and error, and each individual needs to figure out what level of caffeine — if any — is best for them.

— Eric Endlich, PhD

Avoid Exercise Injuries

All of your hard work to get in shape could be offset if you're injured while exercising.

Exercise injuries can stem from overuse, improper form and inadequate warm-ups. Prevent injury by taking these steps:

Get a health checkup. If you haven't been exercising regularly, schedule a checkup with your health care provider first to advise you of anything that could limit your exercise plan.

Start slowly. Don't jump into a heavy exercise program. Take time to acclimate your body to its new routine.

Warm up before and cool down after working out. Spend five to ten minutes doing dynamic (active) warm-ups, such as walking slowly and leg lifts. After exercising, incorporate static stretches.

Consider consulting a personal trainer. These fitness specialists can teach you new techniques, refine your form, vary your workouts and safely guide you to higher levels of performance.

Cross train. Switch up your routine so that you aren't running or lifting weights daily; it's the best way to gain strength, get in shape all over and give muscles time to rest.

Listen to your body. If you even feel a twinge of pain, stop what you are doing. Pushing through the pain is not a good thing. Instead, evaluate what you are doing wrong, adjust your form or just take a break.

Hydrate more. Once you start an exercise routine, drink more water than you usually do during the day. Drink eight ounces 20 to 30 minutes before your workout, take sips during it and have eight ounces no more than 30 minutes after you exercise. More may be needed in hot weather.



Q: What is vertigo?

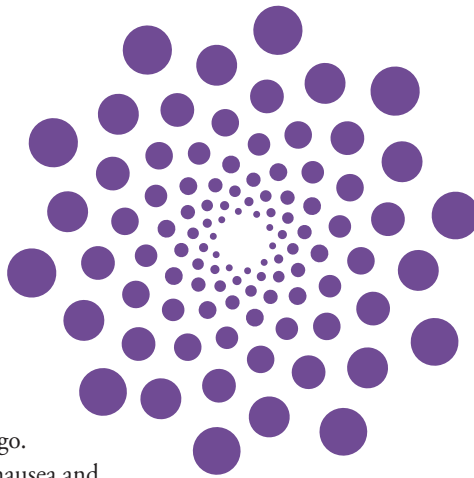
A: **Vertigo is the sensation that you or your surroundings are spinning.** This symptom can have several causes. Problems with the inner ear, the nerve to the ear, or the brain can cause vertigo. Benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV) is a common culprit that affects the inner ear.

In people with BPPV, changes in head position may trigger recurrent bouts of vertigo. Tipping the head up or down, lying down, or turning over in bed can provoke bouts of vertigo. Other symptoms in BPPV include dizziness, loss of balance, nausea and vomiting.

Other conditions can cause vertigo. These culprits include injury, inner ear inflammation and Meniere's disease. Medications, such as aspirin, diuretics and certain antibiotics, may be to blame. Seizures, stroke, migraines, multiple sclerosis and brain tumors can also cause vertigo.

See your health care provider if you develop vertigo. Call 911 immediately if you have a headache, confusion, difficulty with speech or vision, or other symptoms along with vertigo.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD



There's good news about preventing shingles. The herpes zoster virus, which causes chickenpox, remains in the body decades after chickenpox has resolved. But it can become reactivated many decades later, causing shingles — a condition marked by blisters, rashes and sometimes severe nerve pain. A Kaiser Permanente study of nearly two million patients found that two doses of the Shingrix shingles vaccine provided protection far longer than the standard one-dose shingles vaccine. Although one dose dropped to 52% effectiveness after three years, a long-term analysis of the vaccine found the two-dose Shingrix vaccine maintains remarkable effectiveness for more than a decade in adults older than age 50.

Effective Shiftwork Sleep Strategies

More than 22 million Americans work nontraditional hours, including rotating, night or on-call shifts. This can be challenging in many ways — especially when it comes to getting enough sleep. Here are some strategies for getting productive shuteye:

Maintain consistency in your sleep schedule even on your days off if you work a constant shift schedule. If you work a rotating shift, use a gradual plan to adjust your sleep time before a scheduled change to give your body time to adapt.

Create an environment conducive to sleeping. This can mean sleeping in a darkened room with an eye mask or using a sound machine to drown out noises.

Turn off your phone at least 30 minutes before going to sleep unless you're on call. Blue light can keep you from falling asleep and constant noise from your phone can interrupt your much-needed rest.

Practice relaxation techniques to wind down. These can include taking a hot shower or bath, practicing meditation or reading.



Establish a bedtime routine. This prepares your brain and body for rest.

Eat three regular, nutritious meals throughout the day. Important: Don't eat your largest meal within three hours of your bedtime.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine before sleep. Alcohol disrupts sleep patterns and causes fragmented sleep. Intake of caffeine less than four to six hours before bed can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Talk to your health care provider about taking melatonin supplements. Caution: It is unknown whether long-term melatonin use is safe.

Budgeting for Couples

Communicating about money is paramount for couples.

If you and your partner tend to rumble when discussing a budget, here are a few thoughts to consider:

You and your partner may have different financial backgrounds and different financial beliefs. Financial behaviors and views influence daily life as well as long-term decisions. If you haven't already, learn how your partner perceives money.

Here are four questions to get started:

- Did your parents argue about money?
- As a child, did you feel you had as much, more or less than your peers?
- What is your relationship with money?
- What role does money play in your life?

Knowing your spouse's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as how they were formed, will give you a deeper, more empathetic understanding of how they approach money.

Changing responsibilities for a brief time can help.

Person A can take on grocery shopping, clothes buying, and entertainment spending to see how much they cost. This is also an opening for discussing family goals. Often, both spouses or partners have genuine intentions and only want good outcomes for the family.

— Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA



September is National Food Safety Education Month.

Food and Pesticides: The Real Risks

You've probably seen news about produce with traces of pesticides. Researchers and health professionals say traces aren't reason enough to avoid eating fruits and vegetables. Actual quantities of pesticides are required to determine safety (whether there are traces or not). This gap in information misses a crucially important point: The dose makes the poison.

Produce, such as strawberries, spinach and kale, are safe to eat since the pesticide levels are low.

For example, spinach contains traces of the pesticide permethrin, used to kill insects. You could safely consume 3,205 cups of spinach per day for women or 4,487 cups for men and not exceed the safe level of permethrin.

Pesticides are used in farming to control pests and traces are inevitable. The EPA says that very low levels of pesticide do not make vegetables and fruit unsafe. USDA's Pesticide Data Program sets and detects pesticide residue at levels much lower than what is deemed a health risk.



Ninety percent of Americans don't eat enough vegetables and fruits. It's unnecessary to worry that some fruits and vegetables may be harmful due to pesticide levels. The benefits of vegetables and fruits outweigh the harms of trace amounts of pesticides.

Eat more vegetables and fruits, whether they are fresh, frozen or canned. They can be grown conventionally or organically. Eat what you can access, afford and enjoy.

Use these guidelines to ensure your vegetables and fruits are safe to eat:

- Wash fresh organic and conventional produce before eating it. Organic and conventional produce can have bacteria and pesticide traces.
- Wash before you peel or cut vegetables and fruits to prevent bacterial contamination.
- Cut away bruises or spoiled spots of vegetables and fruit.
- Discard canned vegetables or fruit if the can has dents or bulges (it could indicate botulism, a harmful toxin).
- Choose a variety of foods from different sources. You reduce your risk of exposure to a single pesticide and get a more nutritious combination of nutrients.

Your Guide to Medical Tests

Health screenings can help save lives. Your age, current health status, medical and family history all play a role in what medical tests are right for you. For most adults, health care providers usually recommend a yearly checkup which typically includes some non-invasive exams, such as noting your weight, taking your blood pressure, listening to your heart with a stethoscope, and checking your body for signs of skin cancer.

Other tests may be appropriate depending on your personal circumstances. For example, if your BMI (body mass index) is higher than 25, regardless of your age, the American Diabetes Association recommends a blood test for diabetes. If your BMI is normal, your blood sugar should be tested every three years. The American Heart Association (AHA) advises adults who are age 20 or older and not taking lipid-lowering medications (e.g., statins), to have a blood test to measure total cholesterol and triglycerides for cardiovascular disease risk. If the results are normal, tests don't need to be repeated for four to six years.

There are tests you may not need. Sometimes providers recommend tests because so many patients expect and ask for them. For example, some people expect a treadmill test as part of their yearly checkup. The test, which involves walking or jogging on a treadmill while connected to an electrocardiogram, may be appropriate if you have symptoms of heart disease, including shortness of breath and chest pain. But according to the AHA, the test isn't a good idea if you are at low risk for heart disease because it can produce misleading results, leading to unnecessary tests and anxiety.

Providers order colonoscopies to screen for colon cancer or precancerous polyps beginning at age 45, or earlier if an immediate relative was diagnosed with colon cancer at a younger age. Colonoscopy involves anesthesia and a slight risk of damage to the colon. (There are also home fecal test kits for people at average risk; check for insurance coverage.)



Gender-specific cancer tests also are not one-size-fits-all, and recommendations may vary based on your family health history and other factors. For example, Pap tests for cervical cancer and HPV tests for the cancer-causing human papilloma virus can be stopped when women are age 65, if tests have always been negative.

Bottom line: It's not unusual for providers to order additional, potentially unnecessary tests, even if your checkup and health history are fine. Although remarkable advances have been made in medical technology, there are potential risks associated with many medical tests, including exposure to radiation, anesthesia reactions, infection risks and procedures which may cause bleeding. Your health insurance may not cover certain tests, either.

That's why it's important to understand exactly what a test involves and whether you're sure it's right for you. Questions for your provider:

- Why do I need this test?
- Is there another option, including waiting to see if a symptom improves?
- What are the risks or side effects of the test?
- Are there simpler, safer options?
- How much does the test cost and will insurance pay for it?

Trendy Tests to Skip



Full-body scans can reveal countless things to worry about needlessly and cost thousands of dollars.

Many clinic and medical imaging facilities market whole-body CT (X-ray computed tomography) screening to the public with claims they can spot signs of heart disease, blood clots and cancer to stop potentially deadly health problems at the earliest stage. But the FDA says CT scans involve significant radiation exposure and there's no scientific evidence that whole-body scanning of symptom-free people offers more benefits than harms.

You can also get a full-body MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).

One company selling the test says their scan can image more than 500 different health conditions, including cancer. But doctors warn that they're not always accurate. A recent report in the *American Journal of Roentgenology* concluded the average person is far more likely to be harmed on some level by a whole-body MRI scan than benefited by detecting a disease extremely early.

What about a "simple, painless, ultrasound screening" of your carotid arteries in a van or recreation center? Ultrasound is used to image the arteries that run up each side of your neck. These arteries can become clogged with plaque, causing neurological symptoms or stroke. But screening for this problem (carotid stenosis) is best done at a medical center with the most advanced equipment. Even if the screening supposedly shows something worrisome (which is unlikely, if you have no symptoms), you'll be out a couple of hundred dollars and still need to have another scan at a medical facility.

DR. ZORBA'S corner

Sleep and Higher BP

Sleeping is more important than we ever realized. Recent research of more than a million people showed that if you didn't get enough sleep, you were more likely to develop high blood pressure. Other studies have linked sleep deprivation to obesity, depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart attacks, and stroke. It's estimated that one in three people don't get the seven to nine hours of shuteye that they need, while teens and children need eight to ten hours for their growing bodies. To get more sleep, go to bed the same time every day, wind down an hour before you go to sleep, avoid a heavy meal for a few hours before you sleep, cut down on the caffeine, and keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet. Getting enough sleep is as important as eating right and getting enough exercise.

— Zorba Paster, MD

STUDY: Long COVID

There's new evidence multiple COVID-19 vaccinations can prevent long COVID. Long COVID is an often debilitating condition. It's associated with fatigue and muscle and joint pain which can continue for months after COVID infection. But a growing body of evidence not directed at long COVID research shows being vaccinated and boosted regularly can help prevent both a serious COVID infection and ongoing long COVID.

Early in the pandemic, UK researchers found the risk of developing long COVID was 50% lower in those who were double vaccinated. And now a huge University

of Hong Kong study of almost 1.2 million people has documented the protective effect of multiple COVID-19 vaccinations against long COVID.

The new research, published in *Nature Communications*, found that when vaccinated people did contract COVID, the study participants who received three or more doses of vaccines had the highest protection against experiencing any ongoing long COVID symptoms.

“Our findings provided real-world evidence supporting the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines in the prevention of long-term health consequences following SARS-CoV-2 infection,” the researchers concluded.

STUDY: Heart Disease Risk

Time-restricted eating may be a health risk instead of a benefit. At least, that's what headlines proclaimed after an abstract was presented at an American Heart Association's Scientific Session earlier this year which concluded eating across less than eight hours per day raises heart disease risk by more than 90%.

The Shanghai Jiao Tong University study involved 20,000 U.S. adults who self-reported what and when they ate as participants in the 2003-2018 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys.

But despite the headlines, it's important to note this is preliminary research. In fact, it doesn't include information on the quality of the diets typical of the participants. So, there's no way to determine if nutrient density might be an alternative explanation for increased cardiovascular disease instead of time-restricted eating, according to Christopher D. Gardner, Ph.D., Stanford University professor of medicine. In addition, previous studies have found intermittent fasting improves blood pressure, blood glucose levels and cholesterol levels, according to the American Heart Association.

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Stay in Touch. Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

Phone: 800-871-9525 • Fax: 205-437-3084 • Email: PBeditor@ebix.com

Website: personalbest.com

Executive Editor: Susan Cottman

Advisers: Patricia C. Buchsel, RN, MSN, FAAN; Jamie Lynn Byram, PhD, CFP, AFC, MBA; Eric Endlich, PhD; Kenneth Holtyn, MS; Reed Humphrey, PhD; Gary B. Kushner, SPHR, CBP; Zorba Paster, MD; Cara Rosenbloom, RD; Elizabeth Smoots, MD; Margaret Spencer, MD

Editor: Airmie Miller

Graphic Designer: Sheila Nupen

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